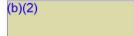
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AFGHANISTAN: SITUATION UPDATE {U}

AS OF 2200Z 5 SEP 95

1. <del>(C)</del> ISLAMIC MILITANT **TALIBAN** FORCES ENTERED THE KEY WESTERN CITY OF **HERAT** ON 5 SEPTEMBER.

2. (C) THE FALL OF HERAT, THE LAST GOVERNMENT STRONGHOLD IN WESTERN AFGHANISTAN, FOLLOWED THE 3 SEPTEMBER TALIBAN SEIZURE OF THE MAJOR GOVERNMENT AIRBASE AT SHINDAND. THE TALIBAN ADVANCES LIMIT PRESIDENT RABBANI'S CONTROL TO KABUL AND THE NORTHEAST AND COMPLICATE GOVERNMENT RESUPPLY. HERAT GOVERNOR ISMAEL KHAN, AN ALLY OF THE KABUL GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT RABBANI, REPORTEDLY FLED TO IRAN. THE CITY FELL ALMOST WITHOUT A SHOT AS ISMAEL KHAN'S SUPPORT BASE COLLAPSED. SEVERAL OF THE HERAT GOVERNOR'S COMMANDERS, ALIENATED BY KHAN'S USE OF TROOPS LED BY GOVERNMENT MILITARY COMMANDER MASOOD TO REPULSE TALIBAN ATTACKS EARLIER THIS YEAR, ARE SAID TO HAVE SWITCHED SIDES AND JOINED THE TALIBAN IN THE LATEST OFFENSIVE. THE HERAT POPULACE WAS ALIENATED BY KHAN'S FORCED MILITARY RECRUITING, AND MANY OF THE NEW CONSCRIPTS RALLIED TO THE TALIBAN. TROOPS OF NORTHERN WARLORD DOSTAM, A DE FACTO ALLY OF THE TALIBAN, REPORTEDLY ARE MOVING SOUTH AND WEST THROUGH BADGHIS PROVINCE, TO THE NORTH OF HERAT, AND COULD LINK UP WITH THE ADVANCING TALIBAN.



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3. (G) MASOOD PROBABLY WILL TRY TO REINFORCE COMMANDERS STILL LOYAL TO ISMAEL KHAN TO COUNTERATTACK THE TALIBAN. IRAN ALSO MAY ATTEMPT TO RESUPPLY REMAINING ISMAEL KHAN FORCES. NONETHELESS, THE FALL OF SHINDAND AND HERAT WILL GREATLY COMPLICATE ANY RELIEF EFFORTS.
4. (G) THE EXPECTATION OF RENEWED HOSTILITIES IN KABUL MAY SPARK A MASS EXODUS OF THE CITY'S RESIDENTS. OPPOSITION PREDICTIONS OF THE FALL OF KABUL, HOWEVER, APPEAR PREMATURE. DESPITE OPPOSITION CLAIMS THAT MASOOD FORCES ARE DEMORALIZED BY TALIBAN ADVANCES IN THE WEST, MASOOD'S TROOPS ARE WELL ARMED, EXPERIENCED, AND DUG IN AND WOULD BE MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE TALIBAN IN A BATTLE FOR KABUL. (DECL-OADR)

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